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Testimony for Public Hearing
Labor and Public Employees Committee
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Dear Senator Kushner, Representative Sanchez, and esteemed members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee, my name is Liz Gustafson, and I am the State Director of Pro-Choice Connecticut. Thank you for accepting this testimony in support of Senate Bill No. 1178: *An Act Expanding Connecticut Paid Sick Days*.

Pro-Choice Connecticut is fighting for a future where all people and their families can thrive in safe and healthy communities, which includes working towards economic justice and protecting and expanding the rights of all working people. While Connecticut continues to lead the fight on behalf of reproductive freedom, it is our responsibility to strengthen and implement robust fair workplace policies—because reproductive health and economic security are inextricably linked.

Everyone needs time to access health care without risking their economic stability. Paid sick days allow a person to recover from short-term illnesses, access preventive care, undergo a basic medical procedure or care for a sick child or family member. While Connecticut led the way by becoming the first state to require certain employers to provide paid sick days in 2011—many workers continue to be left behind, as the law only applies to employers with 50+ employees in certain service occupations. The law does not cover employees of employers with fewer than 50 employees, federal employees, certain employees of manufacturers and nonprofit organizations, and temporary and day laborers.

Additionally, even those who are covered by current law face barriers when seeking to access paid sick days. Currently workers who are covered are only eligible to use paid sick time they've accrued after they've worked 680 hours, which is inaccessible to part time workers or those with multiple jobs. Additionally, workers can only use paid sick time under current law to care for a child up to the age of 18 or a spouse, defined as husband or wife. The law does not include time to care for extended or chosen families, and leaves out workers who care for loved ones outside of the traditional “nuclear” family.

S.B. 1178 will strengthen current paid sick days law by;

- Removing the employer size threshold and job classification list outlined in existing law and require all employers, regardless of size or industry, to provide up to 80 hours of paid sick leave to their employees per year.
- Will eliminate the waiting period for an employee to use the paid sick time they've accrued from 680 hours to immediately after the commencement of employment.
- Will align paid sick leave statute with our paid family and medical leave program, which passed in 2019 and includes a more inclusive definition of “family”. It will allow workers to use paid sick days to care for a spouse, child of any age, grandparent, grandchild, parent, sibling, and any individual related to the employee by blood or affinity who is the equivalent of family.

- Will allow workers to use paid sick time when their place of work or child's school/place of care is closed by public officials for a public health emergency.

Furthermore, access to paid sick leave is a matter of public health, and racial, gender, and economic justice. Workers of color are overrepresented in industries that do not provide paid sick days and are far more likely to lack access to the benefit than white workers. Pre-pandemic, low-wage workers and workers of color were already less likely than higher wage and white workers to have access to paid sick leave: in 2019, more than 32 million people in the country did not have access to a single paid sick day. This gap is even more dangerous and harmful during the COVID-19 crisis for women and people of color, who are overrepresented in frontline jobs that carry greater risk of exposure to the virus but continue to lack critical support like paid sick leave.

Comprehensive paid sick day policies are integral to reproductive freedom, and are essential in ensuring people can take care of themselves and their families. **Pro-Choice Connecticut urges the committee and Connecticut General Assembly to support S.B. 1178**, as it will aid in addressing the persistent gender, racial and socioeconomic inequities that continue to harm our communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Liz Gustafson
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Pro-Choice Connecticut